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September 6, 2006

TO: Each Supervisor

FROM: Bruce A. Chernof, M.D.
Director and Chief Medical Officer

SUBJECT: **CHINESE GRAVE MARKERS**

At the Board meeting of April 4, 2006, the Board instructed the Department of Health Services to take the following actions:

- 1.) Investigate why and when the grave markers were removed from their original locations and report back to the Board within 30 days; and
- 2.) Remove the grave markers lining the crematorium driveway after the markers have been properly catalogued and documented prior to removal. Such work shall be overseen by a professional archeologist; and
- 3.) Research and compile all burial and cremation records relating to the County Crematorium and cemetery site so that individuals searching for deceased family members have one historical record to review; and
- 4.) Work with the MTA's Resident Advisory Committee and the appropriate Chinese historical and cultural organizations to ensure that the markers are relocated to an appropriate location. Once complete, the historical records from the County's facility should be shared with the appropriate historical organizations for their use and records.

On May 11, 2006, DHS reported to your Board that the grave markers in the DHS-operated County Cemetery had been in their location for more than 40 years, most likely since about 1918 when the cemetery was enlarged.

DHS retained an outside firm with professional archeologists, Applied Earthworks who is familiar with Chinese burial customs, to identify each of the markers, recommend the proper approach for their cataloging and removal, and to conduct that work. On May 15, 2006, the firm began their work. After several weeks of site review they identified, photographed and catalogued all markers and recommended an appropriate removal process. During the week of July 24, 2006, their archeologist oversaw the removal of all of the markers, which were taken to their facility for cleaning, identification, and storage. They made arrangements with the Chinese Historical Society of Los Angeles to have each of the markers translated so that the information from the marker can be correlated with the burial records.

This information will be used to determine whether the markers pertain to persons whose remains were later relocated to their native China, or were persons whose remains are still at the Evergreen Cemetery, so that appropriate relocation of the markers can be made.

The archeologist and Fred Leaf of our staff met with the Ad Hoc Committee of the MTA's Resident Advisory Committee on July 27, 2006 to update them on our progress and to seek their input on our process and the ultimate disposition of the markers.

Furthermore, we expect to have the markers catalogued, correlated to the burial database and have a discussion on the next steps for placement of these markers at a site acceptable to the Chinese community.

Concurrently with this process, LAC+USC Medical Center is developing a process to compile all burial and cremation records relating to the County Crematorium and cemetery site so that individuals searching for deceased family members have one historical record to review. There currently exists a complete record which contains documentation of burials from 1896 through 1922 and cremations from 1922 to the present. This decedent information was recorded and maintained since 1896 in a standard written recordation in which each record was handwritten across two pages in a log book. Each log book contains approximately 40 entries per page and has approximately 1000 pages (pages are not numbered). There are a total of 14 books which are completely intact and have been available since inception to be inspected and used by individuals searching for deceased family members. In order to preserve these records and the historical nature of these books, the intact pages will be digitally scanned and maintained for review by deceased family members via computer. The scanned records will be maintained in the same order that they exist in the books and be searchable by book record and indexed by book number and the years covered in each book. Further, the Medical Center will commence documenting future cremations electronically, with a searchable index.

The activities above, complete each of the instructions to the department outlined in the April 4, 2006 Board Motion.

If you have any questions and/or need additional information, please let me know.

BAC:jrc
604:005

c: Chief Administrative Officer
County Counsel
Executive Officer, Board of Supervisors